

INTRODUCTION:

Wouldn't you agree that if you really want to get to know someone, you have to spend time with them in different situations? You have to listen to what they say and watch what they do, and how they respond. Today, let's get to know the Lord Jesus better by looking at three key events in His life.

Our text today is **John 2:1-25**. Yes, that is the whole chapter and we'll look at each of the three events to get a real feel for what was going on.

I really must say that each week we come together on the Lord's Day and listen to teaching on His Word – which lasts around 45 mins – it really is a good thing. But I'll be the first to admit that there is one problem with it... the six days in-between! You see, we as humans have a tendency to rapidly forget a majority of what we listen to, especially when we are studying a book for forty-five minutes a time only once a week. So, faced with this dilemma, we can either preach longer or review what we have gone through already. *Knowing the potential reaction of this congregation, I think we'll just review!* 😊 So let's get a feel for this chapter:

A. Chronologically: This chapter begins with the words, "On the third day". The third day of what? If we trace the chronology in chapter 1 it becomes clearer. Verses 1-18 are what is called a prologue to the book. Day 1 is seen in 1:19; day 2 in 1:29, day 3 in 1:35, and day 4 in 1:43 which is when Jesus went to Galilee, where the Wedding in Cana took place. The third day of chapter 2 is the third day of His stay in Galilee.

B. Geographically: As just mentioned, the place in question is Cana in Galilee. It is interesting to note that Jesus began His public ministry in an obscure corner of the country, remote from Jerusalem. He didn't begin on the highest hill of Rome with a loud speaker, or in today's standards, by having a massive social media ministry launch, or a book he just authored, or a big conference He attended to make Himself know. No, instead in little, small, insignificant Cana. This just goes to show that Jesus didn't seek honour from men, but rather to bring honour upon the lowly.

C. Analytically: As we take a more analytical, logical look at our passage, we find three separate incidents – involving wine, coins, and signs – each of them significant. At times we can read Scripture and miss the underlying message, principles, and applications. Well, today we will take a closer look at each of these main events and discover their deeper significance. Each one reveals to us different facets of Jesus' divine character.

INCIDENT ONE: Wine at the wedding. (2:1-11)

The wedding in Cana is the scene of the first incident. It is possibly Jesus' sister's wedding or one of Mary's close friends. This may be probable due to the importance of Mary's role there where she seems to take over.

Jewish weddings in the first century are very interesting because they are so different to what we know today. For example, there was a one-year betrothal period, which is kind of like our 'engagements' of today, except they were so much more meaningful and binding. If you were betrothed to your loved one, that was it... only a bill of divorce could break it and that due to marital unfaithfulness. Now, at the end of the marriage ceremony, everyone was invited back to the bride's parent's house, or another large venue, for toasts and speeches.

And then, a procession would set out from the bride's home to the couple's new home, and the dark roadway would be lit with oil lanterns held by the wedding guests. On the way singing and music would accompany the newly married couple, and when they arrived, the wedding banquet would begin. And this prolonged feast, mixing ceremony with celebration, could last as long as all week. Hospitality was extremely important – the hosts not only took great care to provide whatever the guests needed but they could actually be legally sued for not caring for the guests properly. Wow! At this wedding, it seems to be a very large one and looking at the sizes and quantities of massive jars for the wine, it is calculated there was about 2,400 servings of wine.

The incident: Finally, the time came when the wine ran out, but the wedding certainly was nowhere near over. So, Mary practically commanded Jesus to do something about it. It is interesting that Jesus responds to His mother, "Dear woman, why to you involve me? My time has not yet come." Wow! That almost sounds disrespectful, doesn't it? But Jesus wasn't being disrespectful, but He was showing that now the chain of command has shifted from His mother to God. He has now entered into His public ministry. He has come of age and has matured, and Mary has to realise that their relationship is now to be different. God the Father is in charge and Jesus is obedient to His will. That's how it should be for every child – first they are raised up by the parents, and then at the right time of maturity, released to follow God themselves.

So Jesus performs His first miraculous sign – water was turned into wine. For wine, you need grapes and time – and what happened here was a chemical impossibility. The transformation took place immediately. Not only was the wine replenished, but it had become "the best of wine" as the master of the banquet had exclaimed.

The issue: I read an interesting fact about the most expensive wine in the world.

In 1980, at the Heublein Rare Wine Auction in San Francisco, a restaurant owner purchased a vintage 1822 bottle of Chateau Lafite Rothschild, for only \$31,000. It was after all, the finest bottle of wine in the world. However, in October 2018, Sotheby's Wine sold a bottle of 1945 Romanee-Conti – a 73 year old bottle of French Burgundy – for the price of \$558,000. It stands today as the most expensive bottle of wine ever sold and is testament to the quality of French wine-makership.

However the fact is this – the world's finest wine was not made in the vineyards of France, nor served in the finest international restaurant, but was made and served at an unpretentious wedding in Cana of Galilee – 2000 years ago. And that wine is valued to this day, not for its rarity but rather for what it reveals about its maker... Jesus Christ. In fact, the real issue at the wedding was not the wine running out but the one who replenished it. Listen to what bible commentator, Leon Morris, highlights about the meaning of Jesus' first sign:

This particular miracle signifies that there is a transforming power associated with Jesus. He changes the water of Judaism into the wine of Christianity, the water of Christlessness in the wine of the richness and the fullness of eternal life in Christ, the water of the Law into the wine of the Gospel.

Isn't that beautiful? Don't keep your focus on the wine or you'll miss the significance of what just happened. In an instant, Jesus' disciples saw proof of His divine power as Creator, and the One through whom "all things were made" (1:3a). Chapter 1:14 says that they saw His glory. Here in verse 11 it also says that He revealed the glory of God in this sign and His disciples put their faith in Him. I want to suggest to you that it is well within the scope of Jesus' power to transform the quality of our lives as well, making us fit vessels to display His glory through us. **Matthew 5:16.**

INCIDENT TWO: Coins in the temple. (2:12-17)

The Passover was the greatest of all Jewish feasts. It was a time of remembrance for when God delivered Israel from Egypt. By Jewish law, every male within 15 miles of Jerusalem was required to make the journey to the sacred city for the celebration. And since every Jew dreamed of celebrating at least one Passover in Jerusalem, many more pilgrims came from outside that radius, swelling the city with as many as 2.25 million visitors each year. The Jewish officials saw an opportunity with this situation to make the visitor's stay much more rewarding.... not for the travellers but for themselves!

The incident: When Jesus went to the temple courtyard, the scene He saw absolutely infuriated Him. Every Jew over nineteen was required to pay a 'temple tax', which could only be paid in Galilean or 'Sanctuary Shekels' – hence, the need for money changers. But the corruption was clearly evident in the exorbitant exchange rate these Temple Currency Exchange merchants were charging. Also, adding to the corruption, was the way sacrifices were approved. You see, people would bring their own animals for sacrificing at the Temple, however they had to be inspected first to see if they were suitable. An inspection fee was charged for this. Most of the time, the inspectors found the animal blemished in some way, disqualifying it as a legitimate offering. This forced the out-of-town traveller to purchase an 'approved' animal at the Temple for around 10-20 times the fair market value. No wonder Christ was enraged. Instead of the appropriate devoted worship of God at the Temple, Jesus found a market place where money changers and sellers were shouting out their prices and merchandising their goods, turning the devoted place of worship into a desecrated place of wheeling-and-dealing. This was like a Wall Street Stock Exchange fiasco.

The issue: We read that Jesus cleared the place out with a whip. I love it! This incident is clearly an account of removing from the temple those who were desecrating it. If you ask me, I believe the modern large scale churches of today also need a cleaning out with whip to clear out all the money exchanging hands, the book sales, the worship music download tickets, the Bible courses, the conference tickets, the in-church cafes, the online products promoted, the church T-shirts and other merchandise.... There is no difference to what is happening in our modern churches to what we read happening in the Temple! And I tell you what, Jesus will also come to clear out the den-of-thieves activities with His whip in one way or another.

The issue here has to do with the sanctity of the temple, which was seen as the dwelling place of deity. Well, today, thank God He does not live in a building made by the hands of man, but rather the Bible tells us that God dwells in the temple of our physical bodies (1 Cor. 6:19-20). The implications of this are enormous.

I read of an account when St. Augustine was fleeing from the sinful temptation of a certain woman, when he fell to his knees and cried out, "Oh Augustine, don't you know that thou carriest around God with you?"

I love that because it resounds the truth that we all need reminding of – that God dwells within us. We are not to allow the place where God dwells to become a house of merchandise – a loud, busy, greedy, deceptive, ingenuine place. It must be a place of prayer, a place of sanctity, a place of worship, where we can commune with God in spirit and in truth.

So how about you? What do you allow to enter your 'Temple'? Does what you allow in enhance God's dwelling place, or does it defile and desecrate it? Is Christ trying to drive out anything from your temple? It may be certain habits, or a lifestyle that corrupts and perverts your character, or friendship with some who are destroying you spiritually. Believe me when I tell you this – Christ is the only One who can clean up your life! He has such a zeal for God's honour, so that if your temple is being desecrated, you can expect a cleansing visit from Christ. Are you passionate for god's honour in your life? **Hebrews 12:5-7.**

INCIDENT THREE: Signs for the Jews. (2:18-25)

The incident of Christ cleansing out the Temple brought Psalm 69:9 to the sensitive minds of the disciples. But the disgruntled merchandisers of religion – not so perceptive – they wanted more positive identification. They wanted to see an authoritative sign.

The incident: You see, what happened here was that Jesus not only turned over the money changer's business tables, but He also turned over their mental tables as well.

The issue: These religious money-hungry church leaders sidestepped Jesus' demand to cleanse the temple and restore true worship, and instead they ask Him for a sign. The fact here however is that they really did not need a sign, what they needed was salvation! Commentator Bruce Milne says, "it was a demand for the visible at the expense of the ethical." The real issue is not what they wanted to see, it was what they needed to believe. Their faith was of a shallow type which based itself upon signs – "Irrespective of whether it is written, if I see it then I'll believe it!" In other words, no physical sign = no spiritual belief.

A number of years ago there was an Australian TV presenter called Mike Willisee, and he hosted a program on supernatural, miraculous signs. On one occasion, he filmed a phenomenon known as a stigmata, where a person experiences the pain and also manifests the same wounds Jesus received at the cross. After he saw a woman experiencing this, another TV report asked him if this incident has affected his view on God in any way. Mike replied that after seeing this with his own eyes, how could he not believe in God? Many of you may remember this interview and account, it was well publicised. The fact here is that Mike Willisee's "conversion" is based not upon a repentant heart of one's sinfulness and need to draw near to God by the blood of Jesus.... but rather upon a mystical, unnatural and horrific physical manifestation that is totally unscriptural and undoubtedly a result of demonic activity, and not God's mighty hand and presence.

I am always humbled at Jesus' statement to Thomas when He said, "Because you have seen Me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29). Believers, do not base your faith in a sign, or a manifestation, or an experience, or else you will have a very weak and unstable faith in God, one that is easily blown here and there by any wind of doctrine. Rather, build your faith on the rock solid foundation of the written Word of God. He will confirm its truth and validity in your heart by His Holy Spirit. Jesus, of all people, will not be misled by mere outward professions of loyalty which do not involve true repentance and genuine commitment. **Luke 16:27-31.**

The real sign has indeed already been given to us – Jesus is alive. And we have the accurate, verified, and validated testimony of this fact right here in the Word of God. His temple was destroyed and raised again in three days. What is revealed in His sign is His resurrection power. **Ephesians 1:19-20** tells us that this same power is at work in us who believe. It is this very power that can overcome death, darkness, and hell in your life. It can bring the victory that you need so much in your life right now. Trust in Jesus right now and that power will be at work to bring light and life to your existence.

CONCLUSION

Let's step back from these incidents and view them from a distance for a moment. What we see is that Christ is the focal point of them all. In changing the water into wine, it wasn't about the wine but rather it was all about Jesus' glory being revealed (2:11). In the cleansing of the Temple, it is all about His holiness and authority (2:16-17). In the raising again of the 'Temple', it's all about His resurrecting power in our temple (2:22). So the focus is all about Jesus, not the things themselves. Once again, we need to realign our focus on Jesus, in fact, our most desperate need is to become occupied with Christ rather than the things of this world. What a difference this would make in Christianity if Christ's follower were all focused on Him.

A W Tozer said this:

Has it ever occurred to you that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same fork are automatically tuned to each other? They are of one accord by being tuned, not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow. So one hundred worshippers meeting together, each one looking toward Christ, are in heart nearer to each other than they could possibly be were they to become "unity" conscious and turn their eyes away from God to strive for closer fellowship.

Hebrews 12:2 says, **"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."** Indeed, our most desperate need is to become occupied with Christ again.

As we bow our heads before the Father, I want you to think of a house which has many rooms. In the house there is a kitchen where meals are prepared and where we feed ourselves. In the kitchen of the house of your life, what are you feeding yourself? What are you growing upon? What kind of food is in your diet? What are you reading and viewing? As we walk on we will pass the living room, the bedrooms, and of course, the closets. What about those closets? We like to keep them shut, don't we? We want to keep the keys to those doors. What I'm trying to say is this: Give Christ all the keys to your life. Let Him invade every room, cleaning out the trash, and filling it with the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit.

Let us pray.

I won't go into a detailed discussion this morning about what kind of wine did Jesus create – was it alcoholic or non-alcoholic. Through my study of the word 'wine' in the Bible, 'oinos', there are various descriptions of this beverage as either unfermented or fermented, mixed or full strength. The most common used wine is essentially grape juice kept in an unfermented state. It sometimes was boiled down to a rich, thick syrup. It then could be mixed with water into a mixture called wine.

Wine of the Bible was different to the wine you and I know today. It was either: (1) freshly squeezed grape juice, (2) preserved grape juice, (3) juice from dried grapes, (4) grape wine made from grape syrup and water, or (5) unfermented or fermented stored wine diluted with water at a ratio as high as 20:1. If wine was fermented and served unmixed, it was considered barbaric, defiling, and incapable of being blessed by the rabbis.

THE PROBLEM WITH THE VIEW THAT THERE WAS INTOXICATING WINE AT THE WEDDING AND JESUS CREATED A WHOLE LOT MORE FOR EVERYONE

1. The guests at this wedding would likely be already drunk.
2. Mary, mother of Jesus, is regretting that the intoxicating drink had run out and is now asking Jesus to create a whole lot more intoxicating drink for the already drunken festivity.
3. To keep His mother happy, Jesus would be making up to 600L more intoxicating wine, more than enough to keep the guests totally drunk.
4. Jesus would be making this fermented intoxicated drink as His very first "miraculous sign" in order to "reveal His glory" and to persuade people to believe in Him as the holy and righteous Son of God.

These facts bring great problems into view and cannot be avoided. To allege that Jesus made and used alcoholic wine is not only beyond reasonable logic, but leads us into conflict with clear moral principles embedded in the total witness of Scripture.

It is clear that in light of God's nature, Christ's righteousness, His loving concern for humanity, and Mary's good character, to argue that the wine at Cana was alcoholic beverage is to disregard the above implications and is simply blasphemous. The only sound conclusion rationally, theologically and Biblically is that the wine Christ made at the wedding to reveal His glory was pure, sweet, unfermented fruit of the vine.